

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Supporting Constructive Relationships

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Many of us working in the United States on democracy assistance tend to consider civil society organizations and political parties, and support for them, separately. But reality remains much more complex, and the nature of existing relationships in the countries we work in and the effects of democracy assistance on those relationships matter for our larger democracy and governance goals. They deserve explicit examination, and this paper deals with two broad sets of questions. First, what do we think we should be aiming for at the systemic level, in terms of the relationship between civil society and political parties? Second, in a given setting, what kinds of relationships, at the micro level, can contribute to democratization?

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ABOUT THE DG OFFICE

The Office of Democracy and Governance is the U.S. Agency for International Development’s focal point for democracy and governance programming. The DG Office’s role is to provide USAID and other development practitioners with the technical and intellectual expertise needed to support democratic development. It provides this expertise in the following areas:

- C **Rule of Law**
- C **Elections and Political Processes**
- C **Civil Society**
- C **Governance**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1 Executive Summary

Many of us working in the United States on democracy assistance tend to consider civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties, and support for them, separately. But reality remains much more complex, and the nature of existing relationships in the countries we work in and the effects of democracy assistance on those relationships matter for our larger democracy and governance (DG) goals. They, therefore, deserve explicit examination. This paper deals with two broad sets of questions. First, what do we think we should be aiming for at the systemic level, in terms of the relationship between civil society and political parties? Second, in a given setting, what kinds of relationships, at the micro level (among individual organizations), can contribute to democratization?

For reasons of time and resources, this paper is not the result of a full-blown research effort. It is an attempt to stimulate critical thinking on the topic rather than provide all the answers. A useful next step would be to collect, more systematically, examples of constructive relations between civil society and political parties (across all the categories listed above), especially those supported by USAID. Above all, this paper recommends that those working on civil society and party programs begin to discuss with each other how their programs can and do affect each other.

The paper begins by summarizing liberal democratic theory's view of the relationship between CSOs and political parties. A critical distinction commonly made between civil society and political parties in liberal theory is that political parties seek to control state power while CSOs do not. In this view, CSOs and political parties have relatively distinct and complementary roles. But even in theory, there are difficulties in making clean distinctions. A quick look at the roles frequently attributed to CSOs and political parties reveals great overlap. Turning to reality, it is even more difficult to specify the distinctions between CSOs and political parties. We can see such functions as representation, mobilization, even putting up candidates, increasingly performed by CSOs in some countries. In a few, the core distinction of CSOs not seeking state power is even eroding. Political parties, meanwhile, are struggling to fulfill these roles in many countries as changes in socio-economic structures erode traditional bases of party membership and throw up new issue and identity groups. How should donors understand and respond to these changes in ways that advance democracy?

The range of relationships that are possible between individual parties and individual CSOs varies greatly within countries and across them, along at least three dimensions—the type of activity connecting a party and a group, the strength of the connection, and the direction of influence. Each dimension has implications for the design of DG programs. The kinds of activities connecting CSOs to political parties include lobbying and advocacy on specific or systemic issues, provision of information and analysis, candidate fora, training of elected officials or candidates, endorsement, provision of money and materials, voter mobilization, constituent services, and monitoring. A party may request support and, in exchange, represent CSO issues in public and decision-making arenas, pursue CSOs' preferred policies, and provide money and other material support. With regard to the closeness of relationships, at least four types of relationships exist from the point of view of civil society. CSOs may avoid contact with political parties, distribute support across political parties, ally with one party, or seek to form a party. Conversely, political parties may have distant relations with CSOs, support from a variety of groups on a short-term basis, or long-term, more exclusive relations with one or more CSOs. Finally, the direction of influence may flow from the party to the CSO or vice versa.

The next step is to consider what mix of relationships is desirable at the macro (or political system) level, and which relationships we should foster at the micro (or organization-to-organization) level. At the macro

level, the ideal political system is one in which both sectors are vibrant and *generally* autonomous of each other, but also entails a *mix* of kinds of relationships between CSOs and political parties. At the micro level, there are a number of activities that we can support. USAID- and other U.S. donor-supported activities directed at CSOs that directly affect civil society/political party relationships include monitoring of political parties, by observing elections, primaries, or behavior in office; training of party politicians; candidate fora; and advocacy of legal and policy reforms affecting political parties. In programs directed at political parties, the link tends to be in the form of encouraging political parties to reach out to CSOs to strengthen political parties' ties to constituents, or occasionally in assisting groups in civil society to become political parties. The question then becomes: When and where are such activities most effective?

Where political parties are too powerful relative to civil society, as in one-party states or countries where the dominant parties have politicized and effectively "divvied up" civil society amongst themselves, the possible tasks of a DG program are to preserve or expand the autonomy of civil society, and to open up the party system, enabling more freedom of choice in matters of political participation and more accountability on the part of power holders. Sound programs would include an emphasis on non-partisan monitoring of political parties and advocacy of political issues. In particular, supporting CSOs to address issues not covered by political parties may help to expand political space. Alternatively or in addition, CSOs might be encouraged to engage in multi-party activities. Support might also be given to nascent parties, including those forming from CSOs.

Where political parties generally are weak, choosing the best DG strategy and set of tactics is much more difficult. In such contexts DG programmers need to think carefully about how to work with civil society (as well as political parties) to avoid unintended further weakening. At the macro level, we face a potential imbalance that may be exacerbated by a donor emphasis on civil society. At the micro level, we need to ensure that the changes advocated by CSOs we support are constructive with regard to the party system, or at least do not have unintended negative effects. The paper suggests working with CSOs to help them understand the implications of individual/politician- vs. party-centered support; encouraging advocacy that improves the party system rather than simply goes around it to the executive; and encouraging interested CSOs to look beyond election-centered activities, like electoral law advocacy and election monitoring, to those that can foster party reform between elections, like advocacy of party laws and monitoring party primaries and voting records.

When CSOs do interact with party politicians, DG programmers may still encounter thorny issues. One concerns the diffusion of support by CSOs across political parties and the alternative, partisanship. Diffusion happens in weak party systems when CSOs provide support to candidates without regard for their party affiliation. While this often makes instrumental sense for the CSO, it is also likely to perpetuate weak party systems. Within the universe of USAID-supported activities, candidate training provided by NGOs is often a case of the distribution of support. The paper argues that individualizing support for elected politicians continues the vicious cycle of citizen disregard for political parties as institutions. It follows that CSOs that provide training and other support to politicians, or aspiring politicians, should consider providing explicitly multi-party help, that is, tying help to political parties rather than to individuals.

The paper also suggests encouraging closer, more exclusive relationships on the part of at least some CSOs with particular political parties. Clearly, certain CSOs should be non-partisan, and some section of civil society in every country should be autonomous of partisan politics. But other groups that advocate interests and even broad democratic reforms might "make a party their project" rather than diffusing their support. A long-lasting, relatively exclusive relationship between a CSO and a party represents committed, concentrated support that may, in certain circumstances, be more likely to help reform one party than diffused support is to reform any party. One key feature of a constructive relationship along these lines,

however, is its conditional nature—one side should not be wholly dependent upon the other, and unable to leave the relationship. Also, while the groups supported might be partisan, USAID support need not be—it should be multi-partisan or multi-party. Finally, in a few countries, among a few CSOs, reformers have begun to consider establishing new political parties. This is a trend that we should consider supporting.

How can DG programmers figure out, systematically and country-specifically, how to support the development of constructive relationships between CSOs and political parties? The paper recommends using the DG strategic assessment framework (*Conducting a DG Assessment: A Framework for Strategy Development*) to help understand and make decisions about the relationships between civil society and political parties in a given setting. The assessment framework moves the analyst from the “big picture” of key problems in democratization, through the dynamics of politics in a country and the institutional setting, to the donor’s constraints and resources, in order to determine priorities and interventions. The paper suggests ways to adapt the framework to enable it to deal better with weak party systems, and to illuminate relationships between CSOs and political parties. Relationships between CSOs and political parties, and the variation in them, are the product of a number of factors, including the nature of the regime and its attitude towards political parties and CSOs; laws that condition political parties and CSOs and their relations (e.g., parliamentary or presidential, electoral laws, provisions for civil society participation in elected assemblies, decentralization, media regulations, and so on); ideas about political parties and CSOs, and their proper relations, and levels of public confidence; characteristics of the civil society and party organizations themselves (e.g., experience in relating to the other sector, need for support from the other sector); and the history of the incorporation of a country’s citizens into political processes and voluntary organization, and their socio-economic underpinnings. The paper then provides a list of possible DG program activities relating to civil society/political party relationships.

1 Why is the Nature of the Relationship(s) between CSOs and Political Parties Worth Clarifying?

Many of us working in the United States on democracy assistance tend to consider CSOs and political parties, and support for them, separately. Some of this is the not unexpected result of history and bureaucratic structures. U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide support to CSOs and political parties have had largely different origins. Moreover, much recent scholarship treats civil society and political parties as distinct phenomena.

Reality is much more complex than this, of course. On the one hand, a wide range of relationships, from hostility and distance to almost complete overlap, exists between CSOs and political parties. In many countries we even need seriously to consider where—and even whether—the line between civil society and political parties exists. This is the case, most obviously, in those countries where laws invite CSO representation in parliament, and CSOs put up candidates for office (e.g., Thailand and the Philippines). It is also an issue in countries where society is both highly politicized and polarized, such that many CSOs are extensions of major political parties. Elsewhere, as in much of Europe and Latin America, political parties are struggling to maintain their vote bases and traditional functions in the face of profound changes in socio-economic structures, and competition from CSOs. These variations are part and parcel of the different paths countries take to democratization.

On the other hand, many DG programs do in fact combine party and civil society elements. Many programs to assist party development deliberately include CSOs. Civil society strengthening programs also include elements that affect political parties and party systems, although often not deliberately or explicitly.¹ What do we know about constructive relationships? Might some forms of support for one sector have unintended consequences for the other—consequences that mitigate the impact of USAID DG programs? This paper argues that the nature of existing relationships in the countries we work in and the effects of democracy assistance on those relationships matter for our larger DG goals. They, therefore, deserve explicit examination. Understanding what we want in terms of civil society/political party relationships, and what actually exists, is necessary to design effective DG programs and avoid unintended effects.

The origins of this paper lie in the author's work in recent years in evaluating civil society programs and researching party formation in the Philippines. Through it, the discourse of "replacement"—the apparently unquestioned belief in the minds of many civil society activists and observers that, where political parties are failing, CSOs can and will provide citizens with alternative means of political participation—arose. It is worth asking: Is such replacement what is actually happening? Is it possible? Is it desirable? There also occurred a discourse of "difference" among civil society activists and proponents. In many countries, CSOs stress their differences from political parties; they are newer, more participatory, more programmatic, less corrupt, and the like. But this difference is, surely, an empirical question, rather than something to be assumed. In particular, how true are such assertions where CSOs engage in political, even party-like, activities?

These questions have already occurred to many in the DG assistance community. Even more tellingly, they have already occurred to civil society activists. As CSOs have become politicized—organizing constituents and taking on policy positions similar to political parties; some have realized that their ability directly to implement policy and change the nature of politics is limited. Some have turned their attention directly to issues in party reform, like *Queremos Elegir* in Venezuela whose slogan had been "politics is too important to be left to political parties." A few have formed political parties. *Mexico Posible* (formerly

Por La Equidad y La Ecología) emerged from a coalition of civil society leaders active in election observation and women's rights in Mexico. Other examples include Primero Justicia in Venezuela and AKBAYAN! in the Philippines. The time seems ripe, therefore, to clarify the issues surrounding relationships between civil society and political parties. This paper attempts to lay out these issues as systematically as possible to enable further discussion and coordination among DG programmers in both sectors. It should be noted that the paper tends to approach the issues from the angle of civil society, in large part owing to the fact that the effects of civil society assistance programs *per se* on political parties, not least their unanticipated effects, are less well examined than the effects of involving CSOs in party assistance programs.

The paper deals with two broad sets of questions. First, what do we think we should be aiming for at the systemic level, in terms of the relationship between civil society and political parties? It seems premature to dismiss political parties as dysfunctional in favor of CSOs. At least in theory, political parties are able to represent, aggregate, and negotiate interests in ways that CSOs by definition cannot. Drawing on historical scholarship and much of democratic theory, this paper argues that both vibrant civil society and effective political parties are necessary for sound democracy. But what do complementary roles at the macro level look like in different political-economic settings? Second, in a given setting, what kinds of relationships at the micro level, among individual organizations, can contribute to democratization? In particular, how might CSOs help rejuvenate decaying party systems? Are there any circumstances in which partisanship is constructive? In addition, what factors influence civil society/political party relationships, and which of these can we, as democracy programmers, influence? With regard to both sets of questions, the paper devotes more attention to weak party systems than to settings in which political parties are relatively powerful,² as the former are less well examined and pose more complex programming challenges than the latter.

The paper begins in Section 2 with a summary of liberal democratic theory with regard to the roles of political parties and CSOs, as this is what most involved in democracy promotion base programming assumptions on. It points to some of the ambiguities in theory and moves on to the complexity of real world civil society/political party relationships. The paper considers both the macro level—civil society/political party relationships in general, in and across countries—and the micro level—the level of organizations and particular relationships. The paper sets out a typology of these micro relationships.

Section 3 addresses programming issues, beginning again at the macro level with a discussion of what we are aiming for, ideally. It then moves to more detailed recommendations with regard to programming, and a discussion of how to assess programming needs. The paper includes examples of donor-supported activities and was informed by an informal survey of organizations whose programs may affect civil society/political party relationships.³ In short, this paper provides a brief introduction to the real-world complexity of civil society/political party relationships, raises some issues DG programmers may wish to consider in structuring their support, and makes a plea for improved communication between those working in each area.

2 Relationships between CSOs and Political Parties in Theory and Reality

A. Relationships between CSOs and Political Parties in Theory

One definition of “civil society” that would likely be broadly accepted among the democracy assistance community is the following: an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values (White 1994:379).⁴ Definitions of “party” have perhaps consumed as much paper as those of civil society but one that would probably have wide acceptance is: an organization that pursues the goal of placing its avowed representatives in government positions (Janda 1993:166). A critical distinction commonly made between civil society and political parties is that political parties seek to control state power while CSOs do not. Thus, for example, “[w]hat distinguishes [civil society] groups from other collective actors in society is that CSOs are concerned with and act in the public realm, relate to the state (without seeking to win control over it)... By contrast, the purpose of groups in political society—especially political parties...is to win and exercise state power” (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1995:27).

If one accepts these definitions and the central distinction,⁵ it is a short step to assuming CSOs and political parties have relatively distinct roles. In the liberal tradition,⁶ political parties aggregate—or represent a broad array of—interests, and negotiate those interests in ways that translate into state policies. CSOs meanwhile represent interests in a more specialized or narrow form. They can demand and critique policies, but they cannot implement them. Moreover, they can maintain a critical distance from the state that political parties cannot; CSOs can, therefore, hold political parties and the state accountable, and fend off power holders from the citizenry. Thus, in its ideal form, we have a vision of a complementary relationship between the two sectors. At the micro level, the level of individual organizations, we might expect to see political parties soliciting the support of some CSOs and in turn their members. CSOs might temporarily endorse certain political parties, monitor party behaviors, or simply abstain from political activity.

But there are difficulties in making clean distinctions, even in liberal theory. Political science literature on political parties in particular contains fairly extensive attempts at distinguishing political parties and CSOs, but most such efforts end in an acceptance of a certain level of ambiguity. For example, Ware admits that “[t]he problem is that of identifying precisely the boundaries between political parties and other kinds of social and political institutions... The boundary between [political parties and pressure groups] is far from easy to draw” (1997:2,4).

A quick look at the roles frequently attributed to CSOs and political parties reveals great overlap. According to USAID documents, “parties serve to organize, aggregate, and articulate the political interests of citizens in the political arena” (1999:4). Other roles ascribed to political parties include holding government accountable, mobilization, socialization, integration, helping ambitious politicians obtain office, governing, and conflict management (see Aldrich 1995, Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Lapalombara and Weiner 1966). Civil society has accumulated an equally extensive list of roles in liberal theory. Diamond’s well-known list of civil society’s functions includes stimulating participation and building political skills, socialization in democratic values and practice (in “large free schools”), articulation and representation of interests, reducing conflict (by cross-cutting cleavages), recruiting and training new political leaders, and strengthening the state (1994). This could be a list of party functions. This paper’s aim is not to throw out political theory on these topics; it provides necessary analytical leverage. But it is important to note that even in theory substantial overlap between the sectors is possible.

B. The Range of Relationships Found in Democratizing Countries

1. In General

Turning to reality, it is even more difficult to specify the distinctions between CSOs and political parties. An important source of this difficulty is that, in many countries, the roles of civil society and political parties have been changing in recent years. In a few, the core distinction of CSOs not seeking state power is even eroding.

In western Europe, observers have detected signs of the “dealignment” of voters from long-standing party allegiances as structural changes increases in wealth and education, coupled with shifts in the nature of work, have occurred, weakening the organized working class and producing “post-material” issues related to quality of life (see Diamond and Gunther 2001; Bartolini and Mair, 2001). Thus old cleavages, for example of class or religion, no longer seem as strong a set of bases for party allegiance and ideology, and political parties appear increasingly to be made up of professional politicians with tenuous links to constituents. New interests, as of women and environmentalists, are rising, and new political parties along with them. The Green parties of Europe are the most prominent manifestations of such newly articulated interests. They are also, it is worth noting, modern instances of social movements—which are elements of civil society—turning into political parties.

In Latin America, even in countries that have had relatively stable party systems, political parties are discredited and face uncertain futures. Economic and policy shifts have frayed the bonds between political parties and their traditional organizational bases in civil society, unions (Roberts and Wibbels 1999:585-586; Sabatini 2002). In the wake of partisan dealignment and declining faith in political parties, CSOs, according to Gerardo Le Chevalier of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), are increasingly undertaking key party roles in some Latin American countries. First, for cadre development, political parties are increasingly relying on the training provided by CSOs. Second, growing numbers of political parties are giving up their own, in-house think tanks, and relying on CSOs in the process of platform development, or piecing together various CSO agendas into one platform. Third, political parties now project issues along with CSOs in fora organized by CSOs. Fourth, party electoral machines are increasingly supplemented or replaced by door-to-door canvassing conducted by CSOs and by contracted polling organizations. In other countries in the region, the collapse of political parties has left an institutional vacuum that, in cases like Venezuela, is being filled not by civil society, but by anti-system, populist leaders.

Elsewhere, political parties have been weak since their countries’ formation or independence, while civil society has become increasingly vibrant. In the Philippines and Thailand, CSOs are often referred to as replacements for unrepresentative, programmatically indistinguishable, patronage-based political parties. Indeed, a new constitution in Thailand reserves seats for CSOs in the upper house of parliament, and the Philippines has instituted a party list system that has encouraged CSOs to put up political parties.

So we can see such functions as representation, mobilization, even putting up candidates, increasingly performed by CSOs. Political parties, meanwhile, are struggling to fulfill these roles in many countries. Even the function widely considered to be the preeminent domain of political parties—interest aggregation—is under attack: Jankowski (1988) argues that broad-based interest groups may aggregate interests more effectively than political parties in some circumstances.

Of course, the respective roles and nature of political parties and CSOs vary greatly across countries. By no means can one say that political parties are in decline while civil society is on the rise across all

(formal) democracies. Most obviously, in much of Africa single-party regimes face relatively weak civil societies that are, generally speaking, more likely to withdraw from politics and engagement with the state than they are to “replace” political parties. In countries emerging from communism, both political parties and civil society tend to be weak, and generally are wary of each other.

This section has so far essentially referred to political parties and CSOs in post-transition democracies. The roles of and relationships between political parties and CSOs in the processes of transition have also varied greatly, and often change after the transition. In Serbia, for example, both sectors played important parts in the ouster and replacement of Slobodan Milosevic, but CSOs were critical of both the incumbent regime and the opposition and have since maintained relatively distant relations. In South Africa, by contrast, opposition parties and CSOs cooperated to effect the transition. Now, however, many CSOs are attempting to remain autonomous of the increasingly dominant African National Congress.⁷ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, CSOs joined a united front with political parties to oust Mobutu, but after his overthrow CSOs aligned with the incoming government, and now have antagonistic relations with opposition parties. Indonesia is, to a lesser extent, another example of cooperation during a transition. In other countries, one or the other sector has been significantly more prominent in the transition.

2. At the Level of Individual Organizations

Most of the preceding discussion has concerned the macro level—the roles and relationships of political parties and civil society in general in a (formally) democratic political system. We need also to consider the range of relationships that are possible between individual political parties and individual CSOs, keeping in mind that these will vary within countries, as well as across them. We can examine relationships along at least three dimensions: (a) the type of activity that connects a party and a CSO; (b) the strength of the connection—that is, how close and how exclusive it is; and (c) the preponderance or direction of influence in the relationship. Each aspect has implications for the design of DG programming: the second and third aspects speak to the desirability of addressing civil society/political party relationships, and the emphasis such assistance might take, while the first suggests concrete areas of support. Section 2 will revisit programming issues.

a. Activities Connecting CSOs and Political Parties

The relationships between CSOs and political parties can take many forms.

- **Lobbying/advocacy:** In so far as a CSO is an interest group, it will lobby political parties to push its general interests and specific policy demands. Most groups will advocate particular substantive issues; a few will push for legislation that directly affects political parties and party systems, as in the areas of electoral regulations, campaign finance reform, and decentralization.
- **Information provision:** CSOs—including advocacy groups, think tanks, and universities—often provide information on issues and even policy position documents to one or more political parties.
- **Fora:** They may be able to run fora that assemble candidates from different political parties to debate or answer questions about their policies.
- **Training:** They may provide training to candidates and activists from one or more political parties, covering topics from campaigning to how to behave while in office.
- **Transitional “home”:** Sometimes, CSOs will produce individuals who become party activists and candidates, or they will provide a home for out-of-office politicians between elections. In

countries where political parties are hierarchical, or advancement through political parties is otherwise limited, CSOs serve as “valuable arenas for mobility” for the politically ambitious.⁸

- Resources: CSOs may provide tangible and intangible resources to a party beyond information and exposure, in exchange for a promise of party support. These include endorsement, money, and materials (such as campaign posters).
- Mobilizing voters: CSOs can play an active role—beyond endorsing the party—in mobilizing voters for political parties. At election time they may conduct voter education programs that encourage voting in general and/or voting for political parties and candidates that conform to a set of qualifications, or they may engage in party-specific campaign activities. Once a union has endorsed a party, it may, for example, hold internal meetings at which members are encouraged to get out the vote for that party. Groups can also maintain and mobilize voters between elections by providing services to constituents on behalf of political parties. Familiar examples are the Islamic and ethnically based political parties with affiliated grassroots NGOs that provide health and education services to (potential) constituents.
- Monitoring political parties: Following a request for support, or independently, CSOs may monitor political parties. They may monitor and publicize party behavior around elections and primaries, their policies and promises, their voting records in assemblies, and their financial and other records.

Conversely, a party may request support and, in exchange, represent CSO issues in public and decision-making arenas, pursue CSOs’ preferred policies, and provide money and other material support. And, of course, civil society leaders may use political parties to get into public office.

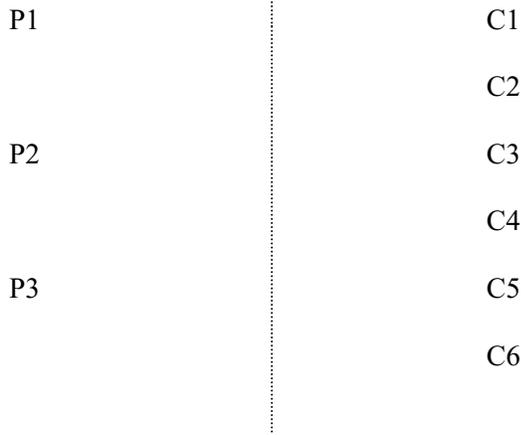
b. The Closeness and Exclusiveness of Relationships

It is important to look beyond such a list of activities that link CSOs and political parties to assess the closeness of the relationship and its exclusivity. From the point of view of civil society, at least three types of relationships exist (see Civil Society/Political Party Relationships diagram), where CSOs may

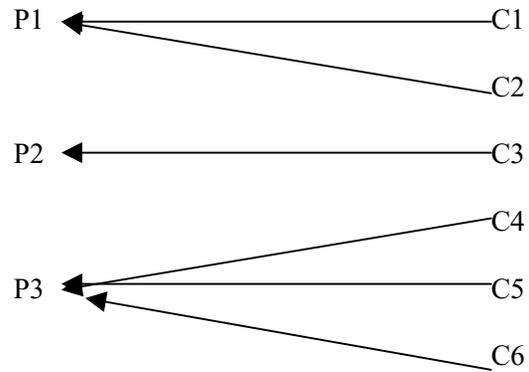
- *avoid contact with political parties.* Most CSOs around the world are probably not involved in politics in any significant way. In the developing world, community self-help groups are often an example. This may be due to focusing on activities that do not require political action, to apathy, or even to fear of reprisal for political, and especially partisan, involvement. Others engage in political activities, but shun contact with political parties for various reasons. Such groups may be willing to lobby executive agencies, but believe that contact with political parties will mark them as partisan, or more generally, that it will involve them in “dirty politics.”
- *distribute support across political parties.* In many countries, CSOs develop issue agendas, then support whichever political parties adopt the agenda (following, at least in this regard, the liberal vision of politically active civil society). In countries with weak political parties, groups are likely to support whichever politicians adopt their agenda, effectively distributing support across political parties. Where political parties are reasonably coherent, interest groups may still distribute support to multiple political parties to ensure good treatment from whichever wins, particularly business associations. Groups with a principled interest in changing the political system, like human rights groups, may distribute support in attempts at broad reform. Multi-party candidate training programs, fora/debates, and monitoring also fall into this category.

CIVIL SOCIETY/POLITICAL PARTY RELATIONSHIPS: DIFFUSED OR CONCENTRATED?

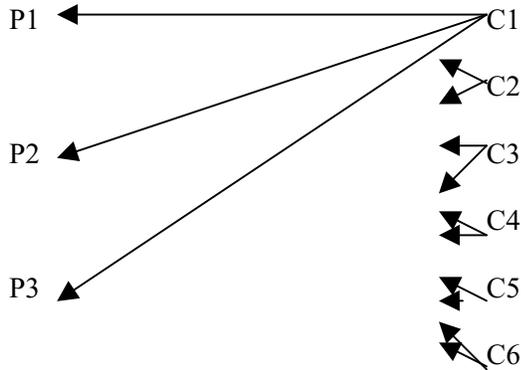
(1) Distant relationships



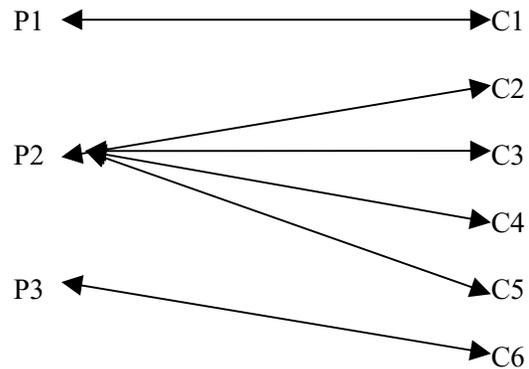
(3) CSOs ally with one party; political parties have longer-term, more exclusive relationships with certain CSOs



(2) CSOs distribute support across political parties; political parties get support from multiple CSOs



(4) CSOs become political parties (and parties conceivably can collapse into CSOs)



- *ally with one party.* This is essentially “partisanship.” In this case, a CSO will provide policy information, training, and other resources exclusively to one party. The most recognizable example of this case is probably the historical pattern of trade union support for particular (usually left-of-center) political parties. Other issue-oriented groups may in certain countries come to believe that particular political parties will best project the groups’ agenda. Thus an environmental group may persistently ally with a green party. Of course, groups concerned with the same issue may persistently support different political parties. National, politically active women’s groups in the U.S. divide along partisan lines.

From the perspective of political parties, at least four relationships are possible. Political parties may have

- *distant relations with CSOs.* This situation may signal a party’s disconnection from constituents, stemming from an inability to reach out to groups and/or a lack of awareness of the utility of such outreach. Or it may be the active product of hostility and competition. In Kenya from 1994 to 1997, for example, CSOs and political parties competed to set the agenda, with CSOs advocating constitutional changes and political parties seeking to solidify their positions before undertaking radical reforms. Learned Dees of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Chris Fomunyoh of NDI both point to competition for donor resources (which go overwhelmingly to civil society programs) as an important source of tension in a number of African countries.
- *support from a variety of groups on a short-term basis.* Here again we have the liberal vision of political parties soliciting the support of multiple interest groups and assembling differing coalitions of support in almost every electoral cycle.
- *long-term, more exclusive relations with one or more CSOs.* The traditional alliance between particular political parties and trade unions is an example of what one might call the “mild” form of this case.⁹ Party think tanks are another; one example is the Political Academy of Central Europe, which served as a training academy solely for the Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria;¹⁰ another is the Reform Institute of Ukraine, which conducts economic research for the Reforms and Order Party of Yuchenko. Political parties may also establish recreation clubs and other groups to attract members. The corporatism of some western European and Latin American countries is essentially the case of long-term, relatively exclusive relationships extended to the whole political system. In many developing countries, a wide range of organized groups in society has been highly politicized and polarized by political parties, including media outlets. Thus, for example, in Bangladesh, almost all CSOs are reputedly allied with one or the other leading party. Political parties are increasingly forming NGOs to capture resources (donor civil society program resources, in particular) and/or to extend their reach and support in society. Over the course of interviews, specific references to this phenomenon were made in Afghanistan, Armenia, Panama, Peru, and the Philippines, and it is suspected that it is occurring in many countries. Islamic political parties, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, may be a special instance of the case of close, long-standing civil society/political party relationships; many are organically connected to Islamic service delivery organizations. Ethnically based political parties may often be similar; NDI works with ethnically based political parties in Afghanistan that provide services such as relief or education through affiliated CSOs.
- *a disconnection with CSOs,* as they break up into or spin off CSOs that may or may not remain partisan; the Ari movement in Turkey, for example, began as the youth wing of a

party, but became a CSO to be better able to advocate political reforms. In some less-than-democratic countries in the Middle East, party activists have formed CSOs (like human rights groups) because they believed they would be more effective than political parties.

While a country may exhibit trends in the closeness of relationships so that, for example, civil society/political party relationships are generally wary and distant, most political systems will contain a variety of relationships: Some CSOs will support one or more political parties, while the majority abstain from politics, for example.

c. Direction of Influence

Finally, one should examine in every civil society/political party relationship the direction of influence. In the United States, we tend to assume political parties are beholden to “organized interests.” A given party may be more under the influence of some groups than others, however, depending on the political economy of the country. Thus business or farmers groups may be more influential than women’s, consumers’ or environmentalist groups. Similarly, within one type of CSO, like unions, some groups may be more autonomous of political parties than others, even within one country. The party may also be more powerful than any interest group. In much of Africa ruling parties have captured or established many CSOs. Traditional Leninist communist parties are the extreme example of the party being in control, with CSOs merely fronts.

The preceding categories were deliberately non-normative. The next step, then, is to consider what mix of relationships is desirable at the macro (or political system) level, and which relationships we should foster at the micro (or organization-to-organization) level.

3 Supporting Constructive Relationships between Political Parties and CSOs

A. What Should We be Aiming for?

In many countries, the general relationship between civil society and political parties is one of mutual hostility and reluctance to engage. In some, one hears that CSOs are replacing political parties, as parties fail to reform themselves and/or decline (as in Latin America), or fail to develop (parts of southeast Asia, for example). In others, the relationship is one of capture, compromising the autonomy of one or both sectors. There seems to be a growing sense of competition between the two sectors for human and financial resources (not least donor funds), and power. None of these scenarios seems attractive from a DG point of view.

So what should we be aiming for? Ertman (1998) has put forward a provocative argument about the ideal relationship between civil society and political parties at the macro level. In examining the varied fates of western European democracies in the interwar period, he finds first that those democracies that survived possessed *both* effective political parties and vibrant civil societies. Moreover, “the *relationship* between political parties and associational life...underlay divergent interwar outcomes” [emphasis added]:

[W]here parties and party competition stood at the center of political life before 1914 and the associational landscape was well developed (Britain, France, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands), the two came to reinforce each other in such a way as to further democratization and increase the durability of the resulting democratic regimes after 1918 (p. 499)... Finding themselves confronted with diverse and well-organized civil societies, emergent parties in these countries sought to forge ties with associations and win over their members, but the resulting overlap between the associational and party landscapes was far from perfect... This lack of a one-to-one correspondence between associational groupings and political parties had a beneficial effect on the long-term political trajectory of these nations. On the one hand, it allowed individuals whose views may have differed on many other issues to organize reform campaigns that cut across party and class lines... On the other, it forced the parties to remain pragmatic and flexible in their positions in order to win the support of a range of interest groups and react to new currents within civil society (p. 501).

Conversely, where the associational landscape was well developed but parties and party competition were not central to political life (Germany and Italy), conservative political forces were fragmented and only weakly tied to bourgeois and agrarian associational networks. This situation created conditions favorable to the sudden success of far-right movements of agrarian and bourgeois defense under the crisis conditions of the interwar period (p. 499)... Associations and the economic interest groups cultivated a growing antipathy toward party politicians in favor of a belief in the superiority of government through bureaucratic experts... While the dense nature of... associational networks... permitted support for both Fascism and national socialism to spread extremely rapidly (p. 503).

The opposite situation, where associational life before 1914 was weak but party government strong (Spain and Portugal), tended to reinforce patron-client networks and the cacique politics associated with them. When more modern right-wing parties emerged after 1918 in response to left-wing parties firmly rooted in associational subcultures, they remained weak and divided among themselves, leading their supporters to seek military assistance to counter the threat from the left (pp. 499-500). Finally... Russia possessed neither party-centered politics nor an extensively developed associational landscape before 1914. The result there was a pattern of very weak parties and conspiratorial organizing that helped make possible the Bolshevik overthrow of the Kerensky government (p. 500).

Ertman’s argument is a helpful, and rare, application of liberal theory to a broad range of concrete and dynamic cases. His review of history has two clear implications for democracy assistance: First, the

consequences of giving up on political parties, and of strengthening civil society exclusively, are potentially devastating for democracy; second, the interactions among the two sectors matter greatly for the prospects for democracy. Fundamentally, democracy involves citizens having choices with regard to their leaders and public policies, and broadly held ability to participate in decision-making with regard to the public policy agenda, individual policies, and policy implementation. Political parties and CSOs, as outlined at the outset of this paper, both play critical roles in articulating interests, shaping and providing political choices, and enabling participation in decision-making. The ideal political system here is one in which both sectors are vibrant and generally autonomous of each other. But such a system also entails a mix of kinds of relationships between CSOs and political parties—some will be close and long lasting, others will be more distant and antagonistic.

Section 3.C will revisit the question of how we might assess the health of the two sectors and the mix of relationships between them in a particular country. The next sub-section expands upon some of the challenges of supporting constructive relationships between political parties and CSOs, assuming a need to do so.

B. How Can We Support Constructive Relationships between CSOs and Political Parties?

Where political parties are too powerful relative to civil society, as in one-party states or countries where the dominant political parties have politicized and effectively “divvied up” civil society amongst themselves, the possible tasks of a DG program are pretty straightforward. They are to preserve or expand the autonomy of civil society, and to open up the party system, to enable more freedom of choice in matters of political participation, and more accountability on the part of power holders. Sound programs would include an emphasis on non-partisan monitoring of political parties and advocacy of political issues. In the run-up to elections in Serbia, for example, the critical relationship the student union movement (OTPOR) (which was assisted by the International Republican Institute, or IRI, and the NED) maintained with the opposition as well as government political parties may have helped keep the opposition from undemocratic actions and thus supported a more democratic transition. In South Africa USAID’s assistance for the active involvement of non-partisan CSOs in the policy arena has helped counterbalance to the increasing dominance of the ANC.¹¹ Support to help CSOs address issues not covered by political parties may also help to expand political space; the importance of environmental groups in Indonesia in drawing attention to larger governance problems before the transition is a good example. Alternatively or in addition, CSOs might be encouraged to engage in multi-partisan, or multi-party, activities. Support might also be given to nascent political parties, like the Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria, including those forming from CSOs.

But where political parties generally are weak—where not only are they indistinguishable on the basis of policy, but also where party organization tends to exist primarily to mobilize voters at elections and defections by leaders and members are frequent—choosing the best DG strategy and set of tactics is much more difficult. There is in a sense no organization to open up; in weak party systems, political parties are temporary vehicles for ambitious individuals. Understandably, where there is little or no interest in reform within such party systems, where the timeframe for obtaining results is relatively short, and where civil society is vibrant, DG programs may, understandably, focus on civil society. The question to raise here is not how much support each sector deserves under these circumstances, or even how best one can spark reform in weak party systems. It is, when political parties and the party system are weak, and a decision has been made to support CSOs, how can we avoid further weakening the party system?¹²

At the macro level, we face a potential imbalance in the direction of civil society. Donor emphasis on civil society may exacerbate a drain of human and other resources away from political parties, and further

erode the image of political parties. How do we address the issue of CSOs potentially constituting a replacement for political parties? This should not be a long-term goal if you accept the liberal democratic argument outlined above that political parties and CSOs perform different roles. But is it an acceptable outcome in the short- to medium-term, if party reform is a distant prospect?¹³ How can we moderate the risk of “replacement,” given an opportunity to expand representation and participation and effect policy change through CSOs?

At the micro level, we need to ensure that the changes advocated by the CSOs we support are constructive with regard to the party system, or at least do not have unintended negative effects.

- At a minimum, persistent civil society criticism of political parties in the absence of constructive attempts at reform should be avoided. Peru’s current political instability is at least in part the result of intense civil society criticism of political parties, in the absence of mechanisms for constructive dialogue.
- Ignoring political parties and the consequences of advocacy for political parties is also likely to be unconstructive in certain instances. CSOs should be encouraged to consider how particular decentralization proposals or campaign finance reforms, for example, affect political parties. Such changes may make party-building more difficult (or easier) in a weak party system, or simply be irrelevant to the needs of political parties in such a setting. For example, the trend to decentralization in Latin America may be contributing to the fragmentation of party systems there (Sabatini 2003).
- Paying attention to political parties, but only episodically—in relation to elections—is a less than desirable approach. For example, CSOs advocating systemic changes should be encouraged to look beyond election- and campaign-related regulations to the study and advocacy of legislation that directly affects political parties between elections.
- Similarly, in addition to monitoring general elections, CSOs might monitor party primaries, where they exist, and voting records once they are in office.

When CSOs do interact with party politicians, DG programmers may still encounter thorny issues. One concerns the diffusion of support by CSOs across political parties and the alternative, partisanship. Diffusion happens in weak party systems when CSOs provide support to candidates without regard for their party affiliation. Civil society advocacy often involves groups supporting any candidate that promotes their issues, regardless of party affiliation. While this makes instrumental sense for the CSO, it is also likely to perpetuate weak party systems. Within the universe of USAID-supported activities, candidate training provided by NGOs is often a case of the distribution of support: candidate training programs supported by USAID and other US donors often select participants on an individual basis (via the first-come-first-served criterion, or some set of personal characteristics, like “reform-oriented”). Ignoring party affiliation—individualizing and even personalizing support for elected politicians—in such programs continues the vicious cycle of citizen disregard for political parties as institutions that characterizes weak party systems.

- It follows that CSOs that provide training and other support to politicians, or aspiring politicians, should consider providing explicitly multi-party help, selecting participants against party quotas.
- Similarly, data produced by the monitoring of individual politicians (e.g., of their voting record in office) ought periodically to be aggregated to the party level.

There is also another possibility—to encourage closer, more exclusive relationships on the part of at least some CSOs with particular political parties. Clearly, certain CSOs, including human rights and elections monitors, should be non-partisan, and some section of civil society in every country should be autonomous of partisan politics.¹⁴ But other groups that advocate interests and even broad democratic reforms might, to use a Philippine expression, “make a party their project” rather than diffusing their support. The argument here is that a long-lasting, relatively exclusive relationship between a CSO and a party represents committed, concentrated support that may, in certain circumstances, be more likely to help reform one party than diffused support is to reform any party. One key feature of a constructive relationship along these lines, however, is its conditional nature—one side should not be wholly dependent upon the other, and unable to leave the relationship. Unions and think tanks provide numerous examples of constructive, durable, relatively exclusive civil society/political party relationships: they have been important means by which political parties are linked to voters and think through policies, respectively.

Groups in durable, relatively exclusive relationships with political parties are partisan. USAID support can, however, be multi-partisan, supporting a range of partisan groups. The point is that USAID should not rule out supporting groups that are partisan or insist that all civil society partners be non-partisan. Rather, it should be asking: Are there circumstances—DG programming circumstances—in which civil society partisanship is constructive? It is also worth noting that USAID is already supporting partisan groups in civil society. Partisanship cannot be avoided by working with CSOs rather than political parties. Most if not all of the CSOs we work with within DG programs are political; they pursue political change in political arenas. “Politically active” does not, of course, mean “partisan,” but it is difficult always to draw a line between “strongly held political views” on the part of CSOs and “partisanship.” Certain civil society demands, demands that we might support, may have natural “homes” in certain political parties. Thus civil society advocates of freer markets or of farm tenants’ rights are likely to work with particular political parties along the left-right spectrum (if it exists at all in a country’s party system)—they are *de facto* partisan. In any case, many of the groups we work with are probably more partisan than they let on to donors. Also, in specific settings, where the incumbent government has been undemocratic, support to CSOs lobbying for improvements in political processes has been *de facto* partisan, in the sense of being against the party in power (the effectively anti-Meciar stance of get-out-the-vote efforts in Slovakia in 1998 is an example). As Pat Merloe of NDI points out, it is *concealed* partisanship that is truly problematic for donors.

Finally, in a few countries, among a few CSOs, reformers have begun to question whether civil society advocacy is an adequate vehicle for their aims, but have also given up on existing political parties. They are therefore considering establishing new political parties. The founding organizations in Akbayan are examples. OTPOR in Serbia has also, reportedly, considered becoming a party. Mexico and Venezuela are seeing civil society leaders found political parties and even CSOs as wholes considering becoming political parties. Such groups’ mission in becoming a party is explicitly to reform the party system from within, by being exemplary political parties and by gaining direct power to influence the political system. This is therefore a trend that we should consider supporting. But again, DG programmers should assess the risks of (1) further fragmenting the party system in the short term by supporting a new party rather than encouraging reform of existing political parties, and (2) a perception of partisanship if no other party support is given.

C. Assessing Civil Society/Political Party Relationships

The preceding sub-section introduced some broad arguments about the kinds of relationships that might be worth supporting where political parties tend to be powerful and where party systems are weak. This

section deals with the question of how DG programmers can figure out, systematically and country-specifically, how to support the development of constructive relationships between CSOs and political parties. Presumably every polity will include political parties and CSOs with closer and more distant relations, but what is the appropriate mix in a given setting? Should we be encouraging more or less engagement at a given moment in time? A more watchdog role on the part of civil society, or more cooperative one? And among which political parties and groups?

The argument of this paper is that the two sectors should be considered more often together. It therefore suggests a DG problem-oriented approach to decision-making about civil society/political party relationships.¹⁵ One good suggestion is to use the DG strategic assessment framework.¹⁶ The assessment framework analyzes the country setting in order to determine the DG goal, and thus could help to determine what kind(s) of relationships we want to foster, strategically and tactically. What follows are suggestions for how the assessment tool can be adapted to illuminate the relationships between civil society and political parties in a country, although the critical problem of democratization, or its remedy, will not always lie in civil society/political party relations.

The strategic assessment framework is divided into four parts or steps that move the analyst from the “big picture” of key problems in democratization, through the dynamics of politics in a country and the institutional setting, to the donor’s constraints and resources, in order to determine priorities and interventions. For the sake of parsimony, it will be assumed that readers have some familiarity with the assessment framework, or a willingness to refer to it for details of each step.

Step 1: Defining the key problems in democratization. Step 1 identifies the regime type and determines broadly “how the game of politics is played.” To do so, the assessment tool posits five key variables in democratization: consensus, competition, inclusion, rule of law and good governance. The most important variables for the purposes of this paper are those of competition and inclusion.

Generally, if competition has been identified as the primary challenge for democratization, then a DG program might encourage political parties to seek civil society support, but help CSOs to provide that support conditionally. Such assistance would encourage elites to compete for citizen support, and protect societal groups from capture. However, competition problems can be of two broad types: too limited, as in a one-party or otherwise authoritarian state, or vigorous but fragmented, as in the weak multi-party system of the Philippines. If competition is limited, the emphasis will likely be on opening up the ruling party (if there is one) or leading political parties, encouraging nascent political parties, and expanding the autonomy of civil society. If competition is present but fragmented and presents little real choice, the DG programmer faces the thorny issues raised above with regard to breaking the vicious cycle of weak party systems.

If inclusion is the central issue, one’s impulse might be to encourage CSOs to try to forge relationships with as many political parties as possible to increase avenues for participation in politics. But it may be desirable for societal groups representing the marginalized to ally with one party or a very limited number of political parties, so that they can deploy the power of their numbers most effectively. The key question here is whether participation is structured in such a way as to have sustained impact on decision-making.

The other variables also relate to the relationships between CSOs and political parties. For example, if governance problems loom large, CSOs may best serve as watchdogs over political parties.

Step 2: Analyzing how the game of politics is played in a country—actors, and their interests, strategies, and resources. Step 2 investigates the dynamics of the “game of politics.” In this step one

Civil Society Groups and Political Parties: Supporting Constructive Relationships

might look at the extent to which key political actors are using political parties and/or CSOs to advance their interests, and how. What is the interaction between the political parties and CSOs? How are resources distributed between the two sectors?

CSOs, like political parties, differ organizationally. A prominent difference is between membership or primary organizations and secondary organizations, commonly termed “NGOs.” The former focus on their own community’s needs and rely upon volunteers. The latter may work with multiple communities, and are made up largely of professional staff. Thus a farmers’ group is a primary, membership organization; the developmental legal assistance NGO that provides it with paralegal training is a secondary organization. CSOs will differ also by the nature of their membership, constituencies, target population, or issue basis, for example, business, women, farmers, the environment, and consumers. Finally, groups differ in the nature of their chief activities: self-help, recreation, advocacy, policy-analysis, watchdog (e.g., election monitoring, anti-corruption, and rights) and so on. All of these qualities are likely to affect a group’s relationship with political parties. For example, advocacy and policy-analysis groups may be more likely to approach multiple political parties. Watchdog groups will want to be impartial and even distant from political parties. But the nature of the organization—whether it has members or is professional and serves other groups, whom it represents, and the activities it engages in—does not uniquely determine how it will or should interact with political parties.¹⁷

To understand how the decision to interact (or not) is made, or to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of a given type of relationship (how close and how exclusive, what kind, who dominates), it is important to look at underlying incentives. A number of such factors will condition whether and how civil society and party actors relate to each other.

From the point of view of civil society actors, they include the following:

- Does the issue the group is concerned with require political action that includes interacting with political parties (or forming a party)?
- Are members and leaders interested in relations or wary? Are they used to relating?
- Does the organization have the time and resources to develop links?
- Does the organization perceive costs to supporting one or more political parties, or forming one?

From the point of view of party politicians:

- Does the party feel it needs the support of organized groups (rather than relying on media campaigns and/or traditional patron-client networks)?
- Are there groups that could provide effective support? Do potential support groups in civil society represent a significant portion of the population (in terms of numbers or other power)?
- Does the party know how to reach out to groups?
- Is it coherent and distinctive policy-wise? or more a temporary coalition of individuals?
- Is the party in government or in opposition?

Step 2 also draws attention to deeper structural influences on civil society/political party relations. The nature of political parties and CSOs, and of their relationships, is at the deepest level the product of the

history of the incorporation of a country's citizens into political processes and voluntary organization. Which citizens have been brought into the political process, and in what ways? This process in turn will have been underpinned by different socio-economic trajectories and the resulting structural cleavages in society, like ethnicity, race and class.

Step 3: Assessing the impact of formal and informal rules—institutional arenas. How political actors and organizations—including political parties and CSOs—behave is strongly conditioned by their institutional setting. The institutional setting structures the incentives and disincentives for a relationship, as well as its nature. Whether a political system is parliamentary or presidential will shape, among other things, how much political parties are likely to rely on interest groups. Electoral laws will influence the number of political parties and their organization. For example, proportional representation may strengthen political parties in some respects, but discourage close ties to constituents. The two sectors and their relations will also be affected by laws on lobbying, donating to political parties, media ownership and freedom of speech, and so on. How decentralized the state is likely to have a significant effect on political parties, although very little research has yet been done on this topic.

Especially interesting for the purposes of this paper is the degree to which laws encourage, or “incent,” CSOs to engage in political action and representation and link to political parties. As mentioned above, constitutions and other laws in Thailand and the Philippines encourage CSOs to act like political parties. The new Thai constitution reserves seats in upper house for CSOs. The Philippine Party List Law explicitly encourages civil society to put up party lists. Mexican legislation has implicitly acknowledged the complex nature of civil society/political party relationships—by trying to tidy them. Three years ago the then ruling party enacted legislation that distinguishes “political” from “non-political” CSOs, and both from political parties. Both types of organizations must conform to regulatory rules and, not surprisingly, the rules are stricter for “political” groups. The language of the legislation, however, still struggles with ambiguities in party and civil society functions: “the law acknowledges and regulates the national political groups (*agrupacion politica*) as citizen associations working to develop democratic life and political culture...In no case can they use the name ‘political party’, and they will only be able to participate in a federal election process by means of a participation agreement with a political party...These agreements can produce candidates from a national political group...”¹⁸ Tanzania provides a more typical, and less subtle, example. The state has claimed that a major women’s organization is acting like a party and is, therefore, subject to greater government regulation. In Japan the government tried to separate associations from political parties in order to minimize the extent to which parties and parliament could serve as anti-government forces (Pempel and Tsunekawa 1979:249).

It is also worth thinking about the ideas about the appropriate roles and relations of CSOs and political parties that are woven into a country’s informal and formal institutions. For example, a central feature of the analysis by groups on the left in the Philippines of that country’s politics is that mainstream political parties are the embodiment of “traditional,” clientelist, corrupt politics, and are to be avoided. In other countries, left-of-center unions have long traditions of expressing their political demands through close party affiliations. Political parties, similarly, may carry long-held notions of their “superiority” to interest groups, or of the importance of corporatist ties with certain groups in society. In some versions of Islamic political theory, there is little or no separation between state, party and society, so close, lasting connections between organized groups in society and Islamic parties are “natural” within this framework. A critical aspect of the realm of ideas is public opinion regarding political parties and civil society—how much confidence citizens’ place in them respectively, how representative and legitimate they believe them to be. As implied earlier, a striking feature of many formal democracies today is the low and declining respect citizens have for political parties. This may hinder constructive relations with civil society.

Step 4: Donor constraints and resources. If the results of the research conducted for this paper are any indication, other donors are not looking at the interaction between political parties and civil society. Furthermore, many not equipped to work at this nexus (because they work with one sector or the other), unlike USAID, with its diverse set of partners. So there is both a need and a comparative advantage for the USAID-partner community to work on the issues raised here.

D. Programming Options

This sub-section briefly describes a number of types of DG program activities that touch upon civil society/political party relationships. Some are being implemented, and we have examples; some are probably being implemented, but we were unable to get examples; some seem not yet to be included in DG portfolios. The types of activities a DG officer chooses to support should flow from a larger assessment of the desired mix of relationships at the macro level (and the even larger DG assessment). With some exceptions, the activities described below could support different objectives, depending on how they are shaped—whether focused on a single party, multi-party, or non-partisan, and whether short- or long-term.

1. Programs Directed at CSOs. Those activities that directly affect the relationships between CSOs and political parties include the following:

- Monitoring of political parties, by observing
 - elections
 - party primaries
 - voting records in parliament

Election observation (with USAID funding) is now an established activity for CSOs in many countries. NDI has observed party primaries, as in Paraguay, and supported Participacion Ciudadana to do so in the Dominican Republic. The monitoring of representatives' and political parties' voting records is widespread, particularly among advocacy groups focused on particular issues. Examples of parliamentary vote monitoring include Hagamos Democracia (IRI-funded), in Nicaragua; the University of the Andes Visible Congress Project in Colombia (NED-funded); and Transparencia's USAID-supported efforts in Peru. Broader, multi-issues studies may also be conducted; with funding from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Development Academy of the Philippines has attempted to match legislation introduced in the national legislature with party platforms. Also in the Philippines, the Center for Legislative Development, with funding from The Asia Foundation, has monitored legislative action on women's and other issues since the 1980s.

- Training of party politicians, in
 - issues—content, implications, and alternative solutions
 - process—how to legislate, ethics
 - local government
 - how to campaign (and win), usually for candidates

NDI's leadership training program in Latin America brings young people from every major party in a given country to Washington for training in outreach to constituents and internal party reform, among other topics; NDI then provides follow-up training in-country. Training of party politicians is not only done directly by the U.S. party institutes, but may also be done by in-country NGOs, with donor funds. For example, the Jesuit University in Bogotá, Colombia, provides party training, with assistance from NDI. The Ford Foundation supported the BATMAN consortium of NGOs in the Philippines to provide training

to elected (and appointed) government officials in participatory local governance. A number of programs designed to encourage women to participate in politics include candidate training. The Asia Foundation and NDI have supported such activities around Asia. In Mexico, IRI supports ANCIFEM for this purpose. Groups concerned with the quality of democracy in general, like the Ateneo School of Government in Manila, conduct training programs to instill ethics in public officials and help get reform-minded politicians elected. These programs have been multi-party. I have also mentioned the Political Academy of Central Europe, which serves as a training academy exclusively for the Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria.

- Holding fora aimed at
 - candidates
 - already elected officials

U.S. donors have funded CSOs in many regions to hold fora at which candidates for office explain their positions, to encourage them better to understand and respond to citizen concerns. Fora can also be held with already elected officials and those in opposition and/or others outside government to debate or answer questions about their policies. The NED has supported Presencia Ciudadana in Mexico to convene virtual debates among presidential candidates around issues related to youth. With NDI assistance, Poder Ciudadana organized party debates on campaign finance reform in Argentina. CIPE has worked with business associations and think tanks to organize candidate fora in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the Philippines. The American Center for International Labor Solidarity worked with NDI in Cambodia to get unions to participate in issue fora with political candidates. In Kwazulu Natal, which has been riven by political violence, USAID supported the Institute for Multi-party Democracy to organize multi-party fora at the community level as structures for sustained political dialogue.

- Polling and surveying

Surveys provide vital information on the issues important to particular sub-groups of citizens. Social Indicator in Sri Lanka conducts a regular survey of attitudes to the peace process intended to encourage both major political parties to commit to a negotiated settlement to the conflict there. In Venezuela, IRI is developing polls that include a core set of common questions along with questions desired by particular political parties; results of the former are shared while those of the latter go directly to the relevant party. Some NGOs may provide survey results to a limited pool of political parties seen as “sympathetic to the NGOs’ aims. For example, the Institute for Popular Democracy, also in the Philippines, is developing a database of quantitative and qualitative data on local voting contexts that it plans to make available to “progressive” political parties.

- Supporting advocacy of legal and policy reforms affecting political parties and the party system, including
 - election laws
 - parliamentary vs. presidential systems
 - campaign finance reform
 - election administration reforms
 - decentralization

U.S. donors support hundreds of CSOs to advocate for changes in electoral laws and practices in ways that may encourage the reform of political parties. In the Philippines, a number of CSOs, with multiple sources of donor funds, have been working together to effect changes in electoral laws and administration, and a switch from a presidential to a parliamentary system; they are now expanding their

efforts to include campaign finance reform and passage of a party law. Other groups that have conducted electoral law advocacy include FEMA in Bangladesh, Transparencia in Peru, CESID in Serbia, and ProDemocracy in Romania. As discussed above, some reforms—like decentralization—may affect political parties and party systems, but often insufficient attention is given to this aspect of the desired change.

- Analyzing policy

Policy analysis is conducted by a wide range of CSOs, from local, membership groups worried about changes in farm tenancy, to national NGOs concerned land reform. For an example of a party think tank, the Reform Institute of Ukraine conducts economic research for the Reforms and Order Party of Yuchenko in Ukraine. The National Institute of Policy Studies in the Philippines primarily assists the Liberal Party, but is also willing to provide analysis to other reform-oriented political parties, with funding from Friedrich Naumann Stiftung. The Center for Legislative Development in the Philippines provides policy analysis to politicians on a non-partisan basis; it has been supported by The Asia Foundation, USAID, and other donors.

Policy analysis is often part of issue advocacy by CSOs to political parties: Some groups may present an issue and the pro's and con's of legislation on it without advocating a particular solution, but others conduct policy analysis as part of a process of developing a particular position on an issue. For example, CLD, as a member of a consortium of women's organizations, has used its analysis of rape-related legislation to advocate for better protection of women's rights.

An elaborated form of issue advocacy is the issue network. In an issue network, CSOs and political parties, along with government agencies, businesses and other actors, work together in a particular issue area to effect reform. The NGO FIDAC in Mexico has formed a network of civil society activists, political party leaders, journalists and jurists to promote a freedom of information law. Other examples include efforts to end violence against women in the Philippines, and pro-peace campaigns in Sri Lanka.

- Encouraging political participation, through
 - voting—in general, for “good” candidates or for one or more “good” political parties that support issues of concern to CSOs
 - joining a party—in general or in particular
 - participating in other ways

CSOs may encourage various forms of political participation that affect political parties, from voting to actual membership. They may do this generically (encouraging political participation as a general good), or by encouraging participation without regard to political parties per se (as in efforts simply to encourage voting or voting for individuals), or by advocating participation in those political parties that meet certain standards, or by attempting to attract citizens to a particular party (partisanship). In Venezuela, Queremos Elejir is holding fairs at which political parties are invited to set up booths and explain their positions; at the same time, Queremos Elejir encourages civil society activists and citizens to attend the fair and join a party (although they do not endorse any party).

- Forming new political parties

U.S. donors have on occasion assisted groups in civil society to become political parties; for example, in Bulgaria IRI helped the Union of Democratic Forces to develop from an umbrella of anti-communist movements into a coherent party. In Venezuela, support from the NED has helped Primero Justicia,

originally an NGO providing legal assistance to the poor, to become a reform-oriented party. Activity in this area need not be partisan, or beneficial to only one party. Donors could, for example, help convene working groups of activists and academics on how to form reformist, programmatic political parties, in a given country, regionally and/or internationally.

- Integrating party representation into CSO structures

One way CSOs link to political parties is by nominating party members to their governing boards. Such board members can provide intangible as well as tangible support, by providing advice on navigating the political system and entrée to it. In the United States, the NED, NDI, and IRI all have political party leaders on their boards. Seats on boards may be limited to an affiliated party or be multi-partisan. The NED's board is bipartisan.

2. Programs Directed at Political Parties. These activities include the following:

- Strengthening links to constituents

The link tends to be in the form of encouraging political parties to reach out to CSOs to strengthen political parties' ties to constituents. In Ukraine, for example, the IRI has had some success in getting political parties to reach out to NGOs on issue campaigns, so that political parties get information on desirable reforms, and they enter into commitments to particular reforms in return for support. In Guatemala, IRI is encouraging political parties to reach out to youth, women's and indigenous groups.

- Improving platform content

Donors may also encourage links to think tanks, partisan or non-partisan, to help the political parties develop their platforms and refine the content of their policy/legislative proposals. The Friedrich Naumann Stiftung-supported National Institute for Policy Studies in the Philippines is primarily responsible for the development of the Liberal Party's platform. AKBAYAN! relies heavily on the Institute for Popular Democracy and the Institute for Politics and Governance for platform development, although it has reached out to numerous sympathetic think tanks and other NGOs for assistance in this regard.

E. Summary of Recommendations

The preceding discussion leads to a number of recommendations for DG programmers, which are intended to provoke discussion (not to be definitive). They fall roughly into the areas of program goals, designing activities, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination among units.

- Use the DG assessment framework to help understand and make decisions about the relationships between civil society and political parties in a given setting, but refine it to illuminate these relationships, and to deal better with weak party systems.
- Do not mistake liberal ideals about the distinctions and complementarities for reality. Also, be wary of generalizing about a region or even a country, and of allowing regional and country patterns to color assumptions about other regions and countries. There is great variation in relationships between civil society and political parties at the macro and micro levels, within and across countries. Assess a given setting carefully.
- Do keep the ideal of complementarity of civil society and political parties in mind to avoid (inadvertent) imbalances at the macro level. If party politics are a critical problem in

democratization, you won't be able to get around it by working with civil society on other things. Consider party reform programs, even if they have to be run through civil society.

- Be alert to civil society autonomy. Where political parties are powerful relative to civil society, but generally uninterested in reform, e.g., one party states or countries where political parties have politicized much of civil society, civil society autonomy is a critical need, along with encouraging political parties to be more open and accountable. The question then is how to reform political parties, as working through civil society may be difficult.
- Where party systems are weak, think carefully about how to work with civil society (as well as political parties) to avoid unintended further weakening—in particular, work with CSOs to help them understand the implications of individual/politician- (e.g., candidate or elected official) vs. party-centered support,¹⁹ and to encourage advocacy that improves the party system rather than simply goes around it to the executive.
- Encourage interested CSOs to look beyond election-centered activities, like electoral law advocacy and election monitoring, to those that can foster party reform between elections, like advocacy of party laws and monitoring party primaries and voting records.
- Encourage constructive civil society/political party links in weak party systems, for example links that provide connections to constituents and information on sound policy alternatives; do not avoid assistance to groups that are allied with particular political parties, i.e., partisan, although assistance overall should be multi-party.
- Support CSO attempts to become programmatic, cohesive, reform-minded political parties if they decide to do so, although in weak party systems the DG programmer should be wary of encouraging further fragmentation of political parties and the party system.
- Encourage program monitoring and evaluation that takes civil society/political party relationships, at macro and micro levels, explicitly into account; and share stories about these relationships and the activities that affect them—for good or ill—across DG programs.
- Be alert to and avoid program designs, requests for application (RFAs), requests for proposal, and task orders that ignore the potential role of political parties in civil society activities (a number of RFAs in the last year do not mention political parties, or mention them only in passing, even when the RFA concerns advocacy and civil society participation in political arenas).

4 Conclusion

Most of us are probably operating with a liberal view of CSOs and political parties, a view in which they are distinct and complementary. As a long-term goal, the conception of democracy in which civil society and political parties are both vibrant and effective, and autonomous of each other, with cross-cutting and short-term alliances, is legitimate. But this vision does not reflect reality in many countries, and does not provide much of a guide for DG programming in democratizing countries. Civil society/political party relationships, overall and on an organization-to-organization basis, vary tremendously across and within countries, as well as over time. To design effective DG programs we need to figure these relationships out empirically. And we need to think creatively and carefully about what sorts of relationships to support in the short- to medium-term. One area of particular concern is how CSOs can support party reform. In settings where competition is limited or absent, promoting civil society as a watchdog of political parties, perhaps even as an alternative to them, seems a reasonable strategy. But in weak party systems, where there is political competition but it is fragmented and/or lacks real content, we face a more difficult set of decisions. Even here, though, CSOs may be able to encourage political parties to be more programmatic and provide information on policy needs and options, to link them to constituencies, and to hold them accountable when they don't deliver for those constituencies. It is not this paper's position that civil society/political party relationships are always critical to democratization, much less that closer relationships should always be encouraged. But if nothing else, we should try to ensure that efforts in one area don't undermine efforts in the other. And first of all, we need to communicate better amongst ourselves to understand the links between the two sectors.

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Endnotes

¹ In doing research for this paper, difficulty was encountered in obtaining information on the links between CSO and political parties in DG programs, especially from groups that focus on civil society. This is likely more of an indicator of the tendency among DG programmers not explicitly to consider the interactions between the two sectors, rather than of an absence of such links.

² The adjectives “strong” and “weak” are probably more confusing than helpful when applied to individual political parties, and are generally avoided in this paper. However, it is generally accepted that weak party systems are characterized by endemic party switching, personalism, unpredictability, and/or an absence of choice with regard to policy stances, and electoral volatility.

³ Of the 16 organizations contacted, only 6 were able to provide examples.

⁴ Civil society, organizationally, includes groups that range from social movements to small membership organizations to professional NGOs, from village associations to farmer federations to business interest groups. The emphasis here will be on legally organized entities since they are what USAID tends to work with, but it is important to note that this paper uses a broad definition so as to capture as many relationships with political parties as possible. It does not deal directly with media relationships to political parties although this sub-topic is certainly worth more examination.

⁵ This paper attempts to identify and work from a common vocabulary among DG programmers, but it is worth noting that there is at least one major school of thought that would not accept the preceding definitions and assumptions: Marxist analysis posits much closer relationships between political parties, civil society, the state, and class fragments. From a Marxist starting point, then, the issues raised in this paper are false.

⁶ See Dahl 1982 and 1993, for example.

⁷ USAID/Office of Democracy and Governance. “Transition to Sustainable Democracy in South Africa and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” May 2001 (draft).

⁸ Gary Hansen, civil society division chief in USAID’s DG Office, expresses the relationship in this way.

⁹ This does not imply that trade unions always ally with only one party; some are opportunistic in their relationships and distribute support.

¹⁰ USAID/Office of Democracy and Governance. “Transition to Sustainable Democracy in Bulgaria and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” June 2001 (draft).

¹¹ USAID/Office of Democracy and Governance. “Transition to Sustainable Democracy in South Africa and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” May 2001 (draft).

¹² The implied focus here is a situation in which the party system is weak and civil society is relatively vibrant. Where both the party system and civil society are weak, building political parties is unlikely to be something USAID can or should do; the practicable course would be to build on civil society initiatives. But the caution not to allow imbalance is still relevant in this context—this civil society-building program should ensure that CSOs are reaching out to political parties and attempting to stimulate party responsiveness.

¹³ Thanks to Pat Merloe of NDI for bringing up the issue of timeframe.

¹⁴ And, as mentioned above, in countries where most of civil society has been politicized and polarized by political parties, we should encourage greater autonomy overall. The discussion in this subsection focuses on DG programs in weak party systems.

¹⁵ A DG-problem oriented approach also facilitates the integration of party and civil society work into *all* DG sectors.

¹⁶ *Conducting a DG Assessment: A Framework for Strategy Development* is a guide for how to undertake a DG assessment which provides a framework for constructing DG strategies. It can be found on USAID's democracy and governance website at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/pdfs/pnach305.pdf.

¹⁷ Similarly, political parties may be programmatic or relatively content-free. If they have a discernable vote base, that can differ by class (working or middle class/elite), or by issue groups. A party can be well organized or poorly so. Classifying political parties is a cottage industry in itself, so this paper will not add to that literature here. As with civil society, there no necessary relationship between party type and relationship to civil society. There may be historical patterns, but given changing structural contexts, political parties need to be engaging in new thinking about to interact with civil society.

¹⁸ From a primer on the law, "Answers to 25 Essential Questions," by the Federal Electoral Institute (no date).

¹⁹ Where feasible, that is in countries where local elections are on a party basis and political parties exist (in some form) at local levels, this recommendation applies not only to national-level programs but also to local-level ones.

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